



**Senator Shirley Johnson
meets with constituent
Andy Prentice**

The Johnson Letter

*From the desk of
Michigan State Senator*

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Senate Renews Abandoned Newborn Law

*Michigan parents give up babies
safely and anonymously*

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The Michigan Senate last week passed a measure extending the Abandoned Baby Law allowing parents to leave their newborn babies at hospitals, fire departments or police stations without legal reprisal. State Senator Shirley Johnson (R-Troy), the sponsor of the original legislation voiced her appreciation to her colleagues.

“The priority here is to save the baby’s life by placing them in a safe and secure environment. While it is extremely unfortunate that we need this law, it does provide an option to extremely sad and unsafe situations,” Johnson said. “Even if Michigan had one abandoned baby because parents were scared of prosecution, that would be one too many.”

Senator Johnson sponsored the original legislation two years ago following alarming reports of the rising number of newborn abandonments throughout Michigan, as well as the United States. Prior to the legislation, it was estimated that 10-12 babies were abandoned in Michigan each year. In several of those incidents, the children did not survive and parents were never located.

The primary statute contained a sunset provision, designating a three year trial period. In that time there have been 18 surrenders, the most recent of which occurred in Grand Rapids earlier this month. Under the law, the parents can anonymously surrender their child three days old or younger at a hospital, police station or firehouse. As long as there is no evidence of any type of neglect or abuse and specific guidelines are adhered to, they will not face any criminal abandonment charges.

Young parents can reach trained crisis counselors for more information 24 hours a days, seven days a week by calling 1-866-733-7733



Charter School Bill Indirectly Becomes Law

A bill authorizing as many as 15 new urban high school academies to be located in the Detroit Public School District inadvertently became law last week. Article 4, Section 33 of the State Constitution reads that, “Every bill passed by the legislature shall be presented to the governor before it becomes law, and the governor shall have 14 days measured in hours and minutes from the time of presentation in which to consider it.” If the governor does not sign the bill in this allotted time “it shall become law as if he (she) had signed it (IV, 33).”

The charter school bill sent to Governor Granholm was agreed to be amended, and as such, withdrawn by the Senate. The House of Representatives, however, did not move to withdraw the bill. The Governor overlooked this fact, and consequently the bill became law. The Attorney General reviewed and confirmed the bill as law shortly thereafter, on October 2. The impetus for this bill to exist in the first place, philanthropist Bob Thompson’s pledge to donate \$200 million to create the 15 Detroit schools.

“It’s unfortunate,” said Senator Shirley Johnson. “Opportunities such as this do not present themselves everyday and it is unfortunate that these parents and children will be denied another choice within the education system.”

While the issue of the 15 schools in Detroit is seemingly dead, the issue of charter school reform and expansion will no doubt go on.

Senate Moves to Extend Merit Award Deadline

To keep the promise of the Michigan Merit Award Scholarship for eligible college freshmen, the Senate passed legislation to extend the deadline until November 15 of this year to certify MEAP results.

“Since the delay in processing MEAP scores began, students and parents have contacted my office wondering if they can depend on the Merit Award this year,” Senator Shirley Johnson (R-Troy), a co-sponsor of the measure stated. “The award represents a promise Michigan made to all high school students who performed well on the MEAP test. This extension provides an additional two months for the certification process.”

The measure, Senate Bill 701, extends the date by which a college freshman must certify his or her Merit Award score from September 15 to November 15 for this year only. Postponement in the release of the MEAP test this summer has left many college freshmen awaiting notification of whether they qualify for the Merit Award Scholarships. The Michigan Merit Award Board will not allocate scholarships unless they receive a request or application for payment from the student by the deadline. SB 701 was presented to the Governor last week.

Eliminating Out-of-State Waste

Despite previous attempts thwarted by Federal courts, the Michigan Senate continues to take the initiative in protecting our environment, thus preserving it for future generations. Senator Patti Birkholz, Senate Chair for the Committee on Natural Resources and Environmental Affairs noted, “The challenge before us was to establish a solid waste management plan which fully protects our Michigan citizens from public health threats, encourages recycling and protects our environment without discriminating against interstate commerce.”

On October 9, 2003, the Michigan Senate approved a legislative package which provides a comprehensive revision of the state’s solid waste management program in order to provide additional protections from inappropriate types of waste being disposed in Michigan’s landfills.

In an effort to jumpstart currently non-existent federal environmental efforts, the legislative package includes two resolutions urging Congress to allow states to control the flow and deposit of out-of-state waste. The bill authorizes the state Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) to establish an inspection program, which would mandate at least four inspections each year of each landfill to ensure compliance. Starting Oct. 1, 2004, landfills would be required to refuse out-of-state waste that did not meet strict requirements. The legislation also grants to the DEQ director emergency power to prohibit any waste that poses a threat to the public’s health or safety or to the safety of the environment. It adds new fines, of up to \$25,000 per day, for violating certain laws related to disposing of waste in landfills, and mandates a 2-year moratorium on issuing new landfill permits.

Three New Tiger Cubs at the Detroit Zoo!!!

The Detroit Zoo announced the recent births of three critically endangered Amur tiger cubs. The 10-lb. cubs were born on August 12 and are tucked away in their den with their mother. The cubs are just starting to play and walk and will be out on exhibit sometime in November. This is the second successful set of births in two decades, with three other cubs born in 2000.

Director of Conservation and Animal Welfare for the Detroit Zoological Institute, Scott Carter says, “The cubs are growing quickly, and starting to explore outside their den. Mom doesn’t let them venture too far yet though. She carries them back to the den when she thinks they’ve gone too far.” The sex of the tigers will not be known until they are old enough for their physical examination next month.

The tiger cubs, offspring of 13-year-old Bransk and 11-year-old Sheba, are a welcome addition to the Detroit Zoo due to their critically endangered status. Sheba joined Bransk earlier this year as a part of a Species Survival Plan (SSP) recommendation. (SSP’s are intensive cooperative breeding and conservation programs designed to help some of the world’s most endangered wildlife.) Conceived by the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) SSP programs are the cornerstone of AZA conservation efforts.



Director of the Detroit Zoological Institute, Ron Kagan maintains, “We were fortunate to be chosen as one of 11 zoos in North America to breed Amur tigers, we are also very excited for the public.” Currently, only 63 zoos in North America hold Amur tigers.

Questions or Comments?
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